



## CONTENT

- 02 Week 1: Foundations & Brickwork
- 02 Week 2: Toilet Wall Construction and Classroom Foundations
- 03 Week 3: Classroom Construction
- 04 Week 4: Finishing Classroom Construction and Preparation for New Building Block

For the first phase of the project, the Disaster Relief team is focusing on Sunrise School, one of our longstanding teaching placements. The school suffered irreparable damage during the earthquakes, leaving teachers and pupils with no building to return to. Luckily, they have found new land nearby in Bhaisepati, Kathmandu, where they have set up a temporary school.

We will be building toilets and washing facilities for Sunrise School, as well as working on the main structure of the school building. The toilet and bathroom facilities have been designed by an architect to be earthquake resistant and will be built from a mixture of bricks, cement, prefabricated material and corrugated iron. The new school will have 16 classrooms, catering for up to 250 children aged 1-16 years old.

## WEEK 1: FOUNDATIONS & BRICKWORK

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The first week of the Disaster Relief Project in Nepal started incredibly well. The initial feedback from volunteers, project partners and the local communities was overwhelmingly positive. Everyone understands the importance of the project and realises that they are part of something really worthwhile.

### ■ Toilet Block Foundations

Before any structural work could take place, we first needed to measure and dig the foundations. The depth of the foundations needed to be 2 feet, which was particularly challenging due to solid earth and 35 degree heat! The six volunteers at the time, however, managed to complete the work in one day.

### ■ Cement base level

Second came the mixing and throwing of the cement to strengthen the base level of the foundation. The volunteers needed to allow 24 hours for the cement to dry. Therefore, they moved onto digging the foundations of the main school building.

### ■ Brickwork

Once the base layer had dried, the volunteers and local mason began securing the structural support and laying the first layer of bricks. The brickwork continued into the second week.



Projects Abroad volunteers lay bricks for the new classrooms at Sunrise School

## WEEK 2: TOILET WALL CONSTRUCTION AND CLASSROOM FOUNDATIONS

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The Disaster Relief Project's second week saw same enthusiasm and determination continued from the first week. The original six volunteers organically adopted senior roles on-site and acted as mentors to each new arrival. Feedback from everyone involved was incredibly positive and each new volunteer took great pride in their own work, as well as the efforts of the group as a whole.

### ■ Toilet Block Floor

With the support structures in place, the floor of the toilet block was leveled and a layer of brick was laid. We then needed to cover the floor in an even layer of cement, using wooden planks as a means of containing it in the appropriate area. The volunteers were divided between mixing the cement, transporting the cement and laying the cement. Once completed, we



The new toilet blocks at the beginning of Week 2



The new toilet blocks at the end of Week 2

needed to let it dry, so we resumed work on the foundations of the classrooms.

Once the cement floor had dried, we were able to begin constructing the toilet walls above ground-level. This was exciting for everybody involved as the structure began to take shape and we were so close to completing a major part of the disaster relief project.

## ■ Classroom Brickwork and Foundations

As some of the foundations had been dug in the first week, it was possible to allow the volunteers to begin the brickwork on these foundations while others continued digging and improving foundations for other classrooms. Digging proved to be the least appealing activity on-site, so this job was generally allocated to new volunteers to ensure that everybody who arrived at the project served their time in the trenches before being promoted to brickwork. This initiation also enabled the volunteers who had been on the site longer to hone their brick-laying skills which they could then pass on to the newer ones.

Unsurprisingly, monsoons and construction work do not get along very well! On a few occasions, we had to spend the morning scooping water and collapsed dirt out of trenches before any foundations could be worked on.

## WEEK 3: CLASSROOM CONSTRUCTION

Week 3 was an incredible week for everybody involved in the project. With most of the foundations dug, a majority of the volunteers now skilled in the art of brick-laying and a steady influx of new volunteers, progress began to accelerate rapidly! As the toilet block was near completion (we were just waiting for the tin sheets to arrive that would form the upper half of the walls), we focused all our energy and manpower on constructing the classrooms. With the volunteers divided between transporting materials, mixing cement and brick-laying, the project ran like a well-oiled machine. Under the guidance of our engineer, Paul, and the local labourers, volunteers were constructing sturdy, safe walls at an efficient pace. As the laborious and time-consuming task of digging trenches was largely completed and therefore no longer a primary objective, the school really began to take shape.

To make the best use of our time and energy, the floor of each potential classroom was levelled off using shovels and brickwork was carried out above ground-level. Volunteers carrying out brickwork were split into pairs consisting of one experienced and one inexperienced brick-layer to ensure that the skills of the more experienced volunteers were shared among the newcomers. This system worked very well as experienced volunteers enjoyed the extra responsibility of being a mentor and the newcomers got to feel more involved in the early stages of construction.

The brickwork of the first two classrooms was completed by Tuesday and, to everybody's delight, they were being used as



Classes were in session in five classrooms by the end of the third week

classrooms by Wednesday morning. The atmosphere on-site was incredible as pride and joy could be seen on the faces of each and every volunteer. This pattern continued as the week progressed; we completed a classroom, the next day it was occupied by school children. By the end of the week, five classrooms had been completed and the construction site had been transformed into a school.

## WEEK 4: FINISHING CLASSROOM CONSTRUCTION AND PREPARATION FOR NEW BUILDING BLOCK

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By the end of the first month, nine classrooms have already been completed. We are also almost nearing completion of the last classrooms, with only the right wing of the classroom block remaining. Having dug up the trenches for the foundations of the new classroom block, the volunteers are now brick-laying the foundations. By our estimate, we will finish the brick walls by mid-July. The volunteers are also beginning work on levelling the floor, so that the tiles can be laid in.

As a reminder, we are building the brick walls only one meter (3 feet) tall, so that should another earthquake occur, the risk of them falling on children causing serious injury is minimal. For the same reason, the roof is made of light zinc sheets, all built on a strong but flexible structure of steel bars.

Our construction engineer, with the help of local staff (including an architect that visits two days a week), is making sure that the construction proceeds in accordance with the plans and the local regulations.

With around 40 volunteers on the site at the moment and new arrivals almost every day, the work is progressing incredibly quickly. A new block is currently being prepared for building. The block will house another classroom, the school library, a staff room and a dining room. The steel structure and the roof have been erected and the volunteers can start work on the foundation trenches right away.

We are also preparing to start a second similar site, at Nava Suryodaya School. This new project will really give the more experienced volunteers a chance to make use of their hard-earned expertise, as once again, they will be given mentoring roles for newer arrivals.